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SUBJECT: GOMA NOTES 04/24/08 - GOMA PROCESS: STANDING TOGETHER TO  
STAND UP THE COMMISSION

REF: Kinshasa 386

Note: The following report was prepared by the Embassy officer  
serving in Goma.

¶1. (U) Summary: The Joint Technical Commission on Peace and Security raced for three days April 22-24 to complete the first block of tasks on the Amani Program schedule, scrapping language that linked disengagement to progress under the Nairobi criteria, and confirming the cease-fire in a bilingual media blitz. Armed groups filed reports (some exaggerated) on their size and locations, and new working groups developed the themes they will soon carry to the people in a public awareness campaign. A Belgian DDR expert reminded members that others will be competing for limited brassage and reinsertion funding. End summary.

No link with Nairobi  
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¶2. (U) Calm action by the International Facilitation at the April 22 meeting of the Amani Program Joint Technical Commission on Peace and Security rallied polarized members behind a compromise schedule proposal that called on parties to the Goma accords to seek information on developments in the Nairobi process. This avoided the explicit link, initially proposed by the CNDP, between progress on disarmament of the FDLR and disengagement and brassage by Congolese armed groups that had blocked approval of Commission's schedule (reftel).

¶3. (U) The Commission then reached agreement on themes for the planned public awareness campaign targeting populations in areas of weak state authority and under the influence of one or more armed groups. The government co-chairman, Vice Admiral Didier Etumba, initially suggested six themes: peaceful coexistence among different communities; integrating all armed groups into the national army; cease-fire and disengagement; the return of refugees; re-establishment of state authority; and information about ex-combatants who have laid down their arms and disengaged.

¶4. (U) Members and Facilitation expanded this to include child soldiers, sexual violence against women, free movement of persons and goods, and respect for human rights in general. As discussion unfolded, the content and scope of themes changed, grew and shrank, finally leaving nine topics that new working groups would define for the next meeting.

Gearing up for the campaign  
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¶5. (U) On April 23, FARDC 8th Region Military Commander Delfin Kahimbi presented a detailed account of how ex-combatants have been reorganized into eight integrated battalions that are now deployed against the FDLR. While they have recovered a small number of arms

and made one significant arrest (an FDLR colonel), their operations suffer from a lack of popular support in North Kivu. For the public awareness campaign to succeed, Kahimbi said, it must take place in areas where the FARDC can protect people from the FDLR and talk frankly about FDLR's evil practices.

¶16. (U) Etumba cautioned armed group members that the Commission's rules of conduct would be observed throughout the campaign. He said they should use only materials, such as flyers and storybooks, developed by humanitarian organizations. Almost as an afterthought, he finally broke the most-awaited detail: members participating in the campaign will receive their full per diem, 2/3 being paid by the government, and 1/3 by UNDP.

¶17. (U) Members agreed to create three new working groups: 1) Disengagement, including eight members representing the GDRC, FRF, CNDP, North Kivu government and South Kivu government; 2) Brassage, with nine members drawn from the same groupings; 3) Humanitarian and Social, working especially on lobbying, refugee and IDP issues, with 13-14 members to be named.

¶18. (U) Also on April 23, a solemn procession of armed group and FARDC representatives took several hours to read statements calling for cease-fire, in French and Swahili. Journalists recorded the declarations for same-day broadcast. The messages called on members of the armed groups, as well as FARDC, to end hostilities; to avoid provocations and violence; to end recruitment and roadblocks; to place any combatant under 18 years of age in the care of the United Nations; and to stop collaborating with foreign armed groups. Finally, they called their groups to prepare for disengagement and integration into the national armed forces, or demobilization and a

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return to civilian life.

¶19. (U) Etumba's earnest congratulations to the armed groups renewing the call to cease-fire ended as he reviewed their reports on troop strength and location. He divided the reports into three categories: honest, dishonest and controversial. The most blatant exaggeration attributed 14 brigades to one armed group, indicating about 45,000 men. Etumba said he doubted any group had even 10,000. Charitably suggesting the group had confused a regular army brigade with the typical French gendarmerie brigade of a few score men, he offered everyone a chance to recalculate and report a second time. He also reminded the groups that DDR officials were engaged in a mapping exercise that could reveal any inconsistencies with the groups' written reports.

Pressures on DDR

¶10. (U) Lt. Col. De Fabribeckers, a Belgian Foreign Ministry DDR expert, was the last presenter on April 23, and the first to raise the high costs of the forthcoming DDR exercise. These costs will create certain pressures, notably: time, as the window of opportunity for DDR in North Kivu is already open and will soon slam shut; money, as there are no large DDR donors, as in the past, and the government can not "play Santa" but must apply the eligibility definitions critically; and trust, as a donor which doubts that the government is playing fair is a donor lost forever.

¶11. (U) DDR candidates from Kivu-based armed groups will in fact be competing with five other groups for shrinking DDR funds: FARDC; presidential guard; six brigades currently awaiting processing at brassage centers; Congolese fighters on foreign soil; and spontaneous candidates. Progression of most of these groups through the 12-month DDR process has been largely short-circuited for political reasons. In the absence of a program accommodating all six, the government will indeed be selective with new candidates from the armed groups, De Fabribeckers concluded.

Final steps before the campaign

¶12. (U) Revision and re-submission of the key documents (theme papers for the public awareness campaign, statements of troop

strength, and requests for release of armed group members held as prisoners) moved easily through scrutiny and debate April 24. Even the armed groups' certification of having removed illegal barriers in their territories passed without problems. Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht brought his high-level delegation to the session late in the working day, and offered congratulations to members and Facilitation, most in coat and tie per Etumba's orders.

Comment

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¶13. (SBU) The Commission's week-long deliberations unquestionably took more time than they should have, but the frequent disagreements, tantrums and reconciliations, supplemented with technical advice from the Facilitation, created unmistakable camaraderie. The gruff and bossy Etumba injected civics lessons into every unclaimed minute, and heard himself quoted from time to time on pertinent topics: the republican army, the inappropriateness of tee-shirts, and the blamelessness of donors and international partners. The Facilitation used the opportunity to familiarize some armed group members, especially the CNDP, with the nuts and bolts of negotiating and managing returnees. It is a safe bet that all members are better peacemakers for having stood together to stand up the Commission. End comment.

GARVELINK